Adlerian Continuity

End the Nightmare

A Bottom-Up Realignment Toward Continuing in a Philosophical Essay for Life Against Discontinuity

By Charles D. Miller V

⚠ The metaphors in this book may be intense for sensitive readers. This book attempts to explain our adaptations in a manner that doesn't pathologize them as deficiencies. The light shined herein may be intense at first, but through this brightness lies a deeper truth that bridges us to one another. Where this flame shines, we may see ourselves and others more clearly. Through this flame is freedom of our own making.

The Nature of this Work: A Disclaimer

This book is manufactured from my own personal reflections, speculations, hobbies, and lived experience with the intent to help myself and other struggling human beings. I have never been — and do not claim to be — a clinician, therapist, psychologist, or medical professional. Nothing I say within or outside of this work should be taken as professional advice. The core ideas predating this work are creations I've made to help myself understand the external and internal world (Teleoaitology, PSIM(I), continuity logic, etc.). These ideas remain as conceptual thinking tools extrapolated from merging truths and consensus. This work is not a scientific, religious, or business model. It is a deep dive into general behavior and life. The tools I made for myself herein help me manage the chaotically overwhelming and confusing experiences I've had throughout my life. Maybe you'll find something for yourself here too. Adamantly, what I've created does not replace therapy, counseling, medical or psychiatric care, crisis intervention, or any licensed professional service. If we find ourselves struggling, reaching out for support is a real option. All of the content within this book is fictionalized, generalized, or symbolic unless explicitly stated otherwise. Regardless, to me, this is my own consensus.

Us

We are the dissonance inductors. The continuity seekers. The truest culmination of success is found through integrated mutual continuity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words alone cannot express the feeling of usefulness I find in my community of books. Floundering in my unawareness, reflective mediums helped me find my own answers to the deepest questions I didn't know I was asking.

At the beginning of emerging from my Long Nightmare, there was Pete Walker — whose empathy in *Complex PTSD* and *The Tao of Fully Feeling* woke me to my past. In the middle, when I saw no way up and life was to be a downtrodden descent into perpetual suffering, *The Courage to Be Disliked* and *The Courage to Be Happy* by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga helped me see a path forward. After recoiling out of the Nightmare, Devon Price and his books *Unmasking Autism* and *Unmasking for Life* brought me clarity and forged prior philosophicals into tangibles. Upon breaching the Nightmare's surface, Lindsey Mackereth extended the warm hand of NeuroComplexity — which finally convinced me I was a good person, leaving pathology in the abyss where it belongs. Peter Putnam's 1963 *Outline of a Functional Model of the Nervous System* also gave me a clearer image of the brain as a continuity seeking dissonance-resolving induction engine. We pause, scan, influence, and modify each other and ourselves in the face of incoming dissonance, or clashes of experience and goals.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you — and apology — to all the people who heard my voice and saw my self in my search for answers, diving deeper and deeper. I've found the bottom. I'm making my way back to you with what I found. I hope it helps.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all children; small and large, emerging and ancient. To the ones who are fibrous, fleshy, furry, scaly, or chitinous. To the valued and devalued. To the crowned, robed, and scapegoated. To those loved and those discarded. To the ones who move and the ones that are still. To the visible and invisible — may you all be heard and seen.

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Breach 01 – Our Submarine: This Safe Place for Why

We're entering the brain submarine now. Firstly, I'm only a passionate layperson with a web of books and personal experiences, an unquenchable wonder for why, and something inside me screaming for coherence in a dissonant world. You can think of me as someone who saw a grand distortion, read a few books about us as thinking creatures, felt that something seemed off amongst the web of books I read, and sought out to eliminate the fog reality sometimes seems wrapped in — and now I can't hold the gravity of what I found to myself. Surely there are those who've been just as confused as I've been. I sincerely hope you find something useful for yourself within these pages.

This book is a conceptual model for existing, with some metaphors that encourage discovery of deeper truths. We're going to thoroughly resolve dissonance that may be hidden just below our awareness — and hopefully, through this journey, we can save a life or two. Since it already saved my life in a way, it might save another's. Maybe yours. Please, take all the time you need to get settled. Find someplace comfortable if you can. A dive to the bottom of the nightmare doesn't have to be stressful. If you find yourself stressed, please feel free to stop and go to sleep or do something else if that helps, but you may not want to. Each chapter is a successive breach through a seemingly incoherent and dissonant world, but we'll be taking this slowly as we resolve the pressure that may come from this dive through dissonance. I've included ⏸ cues to indicate natural points where you may want to take a break or think about what's happening to you. These natural pause points may encourage your unfolding and are there to remind you about your freedom to surface for air at any time. There are no deadlines or expectations here. Only a perspective I've adopted.

Are you ready? Let's dive together. ⏸

The Dissonance That Fractured My Personality

I'd experienced philosophizing for the first time. It was something that I felt shot me forward at an incredible speed. I didn't really know where I was heading, but I ran into conflicting perspectives. One of which is etiology. This is the study of origin and responsibility. Like a kind of beginning to things. The root of etiology is in the Greek *aitia* — meaning cause or reason. All things have a beginning. This means our pain and behavior has a root cause with this perspective. If we find the cause, we can understand our pain and behavior.

The opposing perspective is teleology. This is the study of ends and goals. The root of teleology is in the Greek *telos* — meaning end or goal. All things have an end. This means our pain has an end goal with this perspective. If we find out the goal, we can understand our behavior and our pain.

This opposition was a real problem, not just something philosophical to think about. If etiology were a person, they'd be dominated by past experiences and explain themselves in terms of their experiences. If teleology were a person, they'd be dominated by their goals and explain themselves in terms of what they're doing rather than where they came from. I was so obsessed about where I had come from, I couldn't see where I was going. This is when awareness started flooding in and my memories, thoughts, feelings and actions began to make sense. There were past causes for my pain and behavior, but in my past there were numerous goals my pain and behavior had. This is when I realized that etiology and teleology weren't two opposing perspectives at all. They were actually the beginning and end points of the looping experience we call life, cause becoming goal becoming cause, endlessly unfolding. It was disorienting. Really disorienting.

Yet it was… useful. ⏸

Our Experiences

I had to take a step back and think. Where does experience actually happen? The body-mind. That's where all the stuff™ happens. Our memories. The meaning we give them. The dissonance in initially experiencing life. All of life's initially overwhelming incoherence.

But where does the external world get in and become our experience? The body-mind. The body-mind is the filter where the outside experience intermingles with our continuity seeking experiences inside. Body-specific stuff like cytokines, inflammation, and cortisol are the body reacting to something that we have determined to interfere with our continuity in some way. Experience comes through the body-mind, and our continuity seeking pushes outward from the body-mind in an endless feedback cycle. Just as the physical world is continuous, so too do our body-minds seek alignment with continuity.

Etiology and teleology are the origin and end points of all experiences we have. Our body receives feedback — the beginning — and our mind pushes the output — the end. They're kind of like opposing poles on a magnet, pushing and pulling in endless waves of feedback. To really be free in life, I argue that this cycle needs to be brought into our awareness. We don't need to stop this cycle or solve it like it's a problem. We just need to see it is all. ⏸

Beginning and End at the Neuron

Finding Peter Putnam's 1963 paper is what really inspired conclusions I've arrived at. His work in the paper, *Outline of a Functional Model of the Nervous System,* was dense and academic, but when taken in simple terms it describes the nervous system as a web of

looping and interrelating feedback units all individually seeking their own kind of continuous stability, or continuity. Kinda sounds like human society in my opinion.

Putnam says that the nervous system (our brain is the biggest part) is a bunch of correlates — or correlated neurons each seeking stability. It's kind of like a big ocean of feedback-and-continuity seeking relationships. When feedback interrupts a neuron's state, the whole ocean floods with microscopic continuity seeking actions. This cycle of feedback and continuity seeking never really stops. It happens even while we sleep. The important thing here is that it is both the feedback and continuity seeking that drives the way we live our lives.

There's a word for the adaptations we undergo from the feedback we receive and the continuity we seek. As these adaptations happen within our nervous system. neuroscientists call this experience neuroplasticity. As I read about loops, neuroplasticity, and acknowledged continuity seeking, I realized that etiology is basically the experience or feedback we receive and teleology is our own general continuity seeking goal. Etiology and teleology aren't bridged together in a straight line from beginning to end. No, in fact they're actually a loop. Because one neuron loops to another and so on and so forth. There aren't only past causes and effects from the view of determinism. There aren't only present goals for our continuity seeking purposes from the view of free will or self-determinism. The unifying perspective is that both are true and interact. We experience and act on the loop of interrelationships that we call "being alive." Experiences influence goals and our goals modify our experiences in the present moment, in our personal oceans of experience and continuity seeking. This looping and interrelating ocean isn't a problem in itself, it's just us. Problems only arise when individual continuity-seeking devalues and discards another's continuity. Joy arises when individual continuity-seeking values and assists another's continuity. II

The Continuous Mind

Neuroplasticity is a looping experience that can help us have more choices — more freedom — but it's also something that can constrict our choices when it stagnates and can make us less free and more controlled. So how do we actually use this loop we're inside of to make ourselves freer in body, mind, and spirit?

Andrew Huberman helped me understand neuroplasticity isn't only passive. It is actually something we can interfere with, for better or for worse. He says neuroplasticity requires temporary agitation first, or activation. Probably from something like our feedback to ourselves or from others for example. We do or experience the agitating thing or experience something difficult — maybe even distressing — and then deep rest or sleep cements the new changes. We don't change while we're awake, we do so when we take real moments to pause. Resting and sleep aren't weaknesses or an escape but are moments when we keep what we've worked on during the day for ourselves instead of letting it pass us by.

I believe Pete Walker's view on grieving aligns with healthy neuroplasticity. What he said really made me feel just in all my years dealing with someone who couldn't see they were hurting me: true forgiveness doesn't come without true blame. Grieving — the kind where we get angry and/or cry — is part of how the brain resolves incoherent dissonance and adapts. It's ok to blame someone who hurt you and then go to sleep. If blaming them directly isn't safe, then we can go ahead and just imagine the blame being sent to them instead of toward ourselves. Think of blame like an arrow meant to pierce their rigidity. Some people don't want to change and so blame falls on deaf ears. When we finally see the memory and goal of what we experienced and what we did to maintain our continuity, we can make a more honest judgement for ourselves and find peace. Interestingly enough, memory could be the etiological cause for how we live our lives,

while continuity seeking could be the teleological goal our lives have. Huberman says we have two "spotlights" — limited lenses for perceiving our experiences in the present moment. Could these spotlights in their extreme be etiology and teleology at the same time? Maybe, but next we'll dive into what kind of feedback and experiences influence our continuity seeking goals. I think life may be a little less incoherent if we take a look experience itself. ⏸

Experience Runs from Boring to Distressing

Nicole LePera — the Holistic Psychologist — said something that gave me a surprised feeling at first but pushed truth nonetheless: "Stress is an inevitable part of life." This prompted some insight into the distressing end of experiences we have, and how they influence our continuity-seeking strategies. I thought about how stress inoculation can lead to better adaptation, but it also kind of implied — in the context of neuroplasticity — that distress actually leads to extremely focused continuity adaptations that may seem self-destructive from the outside while on the inside give us a feeling of successful continuity seeking.

You can try this perspective out for yourself if you'd like. If we're going to do whatever it is we do to cope, we can at least try to see why. It's because deep down, we feel as if something is interrupting our continuity. That is to say we feel a kind of distress or fear from our own hidden awareness that we may not actually be successful in our own continuity. It's an intense feeling of not having truly secured our continuity. The things we do to cope with distress aren't inherent signs of deficiencies. The things we do secretly tell us what our true goals are. Pause here and see for yourself if you want. You may no longer feel as attached to whatever it is you do that gives us a feeling of continuity. It may actually be interrupting our continuity instead. In fact, you may notice that it's actually fear itself you're feeling rather than satisfaction from the things you do. ⏸

Boredom is also inevitable in life and remains a more consistent challenge after we undergo enough dissonance induction resolution. We tend to avoid boredom because stagnation tends to get in the way of our own feeling of continuity, and so we form present goals to feed our feeling of continuity.

You see, there's this tool called the Yerkes-Dodson law — originally used to measure performance during various states from bored to distressed. It seems to map the ebb and flow of our successful continuity performance during distress and boredom throughout our life. I reinterpret this law to be a useful tool to see how capable we really are during the most boring and most distressing moments in our lives. Really think about it. Hasn't everything we've done at it's core been to serve continuity in some way? Continuity for ourselves or for others if you've ever had that concern? When there's too little stress or activation — like boredom and flatness — we don't really perform our own continuity goal well, do we? We just kind of sit there with a subtle desire to do something.

On the other end of the extreme, when we feel too much stress — distress, overwhelm, complex trauma, traumatic cognitive dissonance — we jump to extreme continuity seeking. There's optimal stress in between distress and boredom where we almost have a strange kind of fun with a challenge but aren't so overcome with dissonant interruptions that we enter what's called dorsal-vagal shutdown. Peter Salerno, PsyD, describes this as something that happens to us when we have an experience or receive feedback that causes traumatic cognitive dissonance. The shutdown, or pause, that happens at that moment may be our continuity goal forcing us to stop and resolve the interruption.

To me, the Yerkes-Dodson law is about more than just successful performance. It's also a useful tool to understand every experience or moment of feedback that ever arrives

in our lifetime. Everything we experience lands somewhere on this continuum: boredom (not enough activation), optimal stress (beneficial activation), or distress (overwhelming activation). What's distressing to one of us is not enough for another and optimal to a third. The amount of dissonance a thing creates is entirely subjective within us — shaped by our memories, our continuity methods, and our currently available equipment. Equipment refers to our body-minds and the resources we can access to maintain continuity. ⏸

The Goal-Cause at the Bottom

We talked about how etiology and teleology are connected in a kind of loop rather than a simple beginning and end. We're diving to the root of the nightmare now. The bottom of everything we're circling is something remarkably simple.

I decided that language didn't really have a word for what I was thinking, so I took the Greek roots of etiology and teleology and merged them into one connected moment. I call it teleoaitology — the hybrid experience that merges the perception of goals and the perception of causes into a single recursive moment: the teleoaitia or goal-cause. Not causes leading to goals, not goals emerging from causes, but the two being, at any given instant, the same thing seen from different directions. This was actually the result of a special kind of mind medicine I call dissonance induction resolution. It's a kind of three step process where things that are alive experience some kind of clashing feedback, respond with continuity goals by absorbing and adapting to the clashing feedback, and then eventually resolving the interruption to continuity through infinitely varied forms of pausing, scanning, influencing, and modifying.

And when I looked through that lens at the bottom of all behavior, every behavior, conscious or unconscious, aware or completely hidden from awareness, I found something devastatingly simple about people, bugs, brainless life, and animals. It's the

thing I now call the root teleoaitia: the goal-cause that underlies all of life's consistent push against discontinuity and entropy.

Goal-Cause: Continue.

Like a ceaseless whisper from the beginning of everything. Suddenly, it seemed to me like the only contradiction in the universe that has ever existed is us: life. The things that live and move as the dissonance against entropy. The continuers aligned with entropy (narcissists are extreme examples) who propagate dissonance with intent to control are problematic but not enemies though they may see the dissonance inducting resolvers as foes. Regardless, we continue anyway. Even when it doesn't seem like we're moving at all. Even when it looks like shutdown, collapse, or free fall. Even in free fall straight through dissonance itself, something in us is still oriented toward continuing. We may cultivate courage, optimism, and ambition but the thing underneath everything has always been there.

In the safety of these pages, our submarine has found the floor. It's ok to grieve.

This could feel like a good place to rest. In fact — sleeping now would probably cement this first dive. Each layer is meant to be breached slowly, over multiple days if possible. There's no rush. Put the book down if you need to. Come back when you're ready. This was the first breach. The breach into ourselves.

Goodnight, diver. ⏸

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Breach 02 – The Contradiction: A Map of Us

When I Saw Myself for the First Time

There's a moment I hold special feelings for. I was lying in bed while reading, and the next moment I was facing a possibility that I could simply just... deny my trauma. It sounded too radical to be something I could immediately do. I was shocked and baffled but kept reading anyway. Something about what Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga wrote in *The Courage to Be Disliked* and *The Courage to Be Happy* offered me a freer life to live than the life where everything I did was because of my trauma — my memories colliding with my continuity seeking goal. I had just realized I actually hated living that way. I felt powerless against my own memories. Deeper yet, it was implied that trauma behaviors are actually behaviors rooted in a feeling of having no control over one's own continuity or the continuity of a loved one. It's fear. Fear that what's in memory isn't resolved, because it probably wasn't resolved. Something happened, maybe for a long time, and then it was over. Or maybe it's still happening. We're meant to do dissonance induction resolution and grieving. I didn't break in that moment. I resolved dissonance I didn't know I was suffering from. I realized it wasn't my memories causing me suffering, but my own failure at maintaining my continuity and the continuity of others when faced with discontinuity. I sat up. My heart was going. I finally understood.

Here's how I got here. I'd just finished Pete Walker's *Complex PTSD* and *The Tao of Fully Feeling*. If you've read it, you know how valuable those resources are for understanding the crap we experienced. If you haven't experienced those incredibly beautiful works — imagine experiencing something that is essentially a loving and deeply understanding mirror that tells you: everything was real, here's what we call it, you're not to blame, and here's what you can do from now on. It felt like finding a healthy parent in

a book. I loved every page of both of those books. It felt like being seen and having my mind read. And then, almost immediately, I was picking up *The Courage to Be Disliked* by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga, which lays out Adlerian psychology with the warmth of a good mentor, saying essentially: our trauma doesn't have to define our choices. We are not our past moments. Freedom is available in this moment right now, for all of us. We've already continued. We been doing it!

Pete Walker, Kishimi, and Koga were all right. Somehow, I knew, that I was right to believe in what I read. Because those books actually assisted in my own continuity and helped me propagate that continuity within my own fractured family. They didn't suffocate or deny the self or others. They served the happiness of us. And yet they initially felt like they were saying opposing things. That's why teleoaitology and the root goal-cause: continue are so important to integrate. Trauma is real and shapes your patterns. But through neuroplasticity and dissonance induction resolution over enough new and continuity-assisting experiences lies actual resolutions for our problems.

Without knowing it that night, I performed major dissonance induction resolution. It was the healthiest thing that had ever happened to me. And it felt, in the moment, like my mind shattering in my hands. ⏸

Finding My Own Reflection

I've had numerous diagnoses throughout my life, none of which quite fit my experience. I've learned that some of my subjectively critical assumptions about myself came from a place of over-the-top — dare I say dramatically distorted — inner criticism. Self-judgement from having been a partner who tried to be good enough and useful for both our sakes but wasn't able to be what the other truly needed. In other words, their closeness to self-destruction was a constant source of anxiety. I had never felt suicidal beforehand, but this began to chip away my own self-coherence (which wasn't super

strong at the time). I should have realized sooner that I wasn't really equipped to rescue them while I was drowning myself. That and I've had misperceptions — delusions possibly — about some people I was close to which became very problematic. There was one time I thought a friend was a criminal out to get me when they weren't. I think I really hurt their feelings.

One thing I do remember from the past — my memories scanned today — was a consistent rage for constantly having my boundaries destroyed by someone close to me, and how that rage came from a place of continuity seeking, but so did their boundary destruction. Beneath the rage was grief screaming for coherence and mutually assured continuity. The constant battles in childhood sucked, especially since the boundary destroyer was a self-destructing loved one. This book is just as much for myself as it is for anyone else looking for coherence in a world that seems nonsensical at first.

Even having come this far, I still have remnants of an insecurity that someone will distort who I am, like that person did, in such a way as to say "Look, the face under the mask, they're a narcissist for all the fighting they did. Victims never think about retaliating." After resolving my experienced dissonance through dissonance induction resolution — and finding out what trauma really is, especially after what I experienced repeatedly growing up — I trust myself more. I've encountered my truth, my consensus. I'm just a normal human after all. Will you encounter yours? ||

Unmasking Continuity

Once I built the goal-cause bridge — once Continue became the lens I looked through — something inescapable emerged on the other side. It couldn't be just mine. It was too fundamental, too cellular. Every living thing shares this. The drive to continue is not a human value or a cultural choice. It is the most basic fact of biology, the counter-entropic

push woven into every organism that has ever drawn breath or extracted energy or divided itself in two to survive.

Every behavior, conscious or not, inside or outside our awareness, is an attempt to preserve continuity. Every single one. Including the ones that look, from the outside, like self-destruction. Including the ones that have been labeled disorders or deficiencies or moral failures. Look under any of them long enough and you find the same thing: a being trying, in the only way it currently knows, to continue.

And then the hardest question: why does seeking discontinuity happen? If Continue is the goal-cause, why do we sometimes collapse inward? I've thought about this for a long time, and here's what I've come to. Overwhelming dissonance hijacks the brain — floods it, saturates it — until the organism cannot find a path from where it is to where it needs to be. And in that flooded state, a terrible lie becomes possible: the lie that ending the self ends the dissonance. That death is relief. But dissonance isn't stored in the self. It's stored in the gap between the self and the unresolved interruption. Closing the self doesn't close the gap. It just eliminates the one thing capable of eventually resolving it.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call or text 988

We don't have to die to get what we want. Freedom may be temporarily out of reach. It won't always be that way. That's harder to accept than to say, and I know it. I've been in the place where it sounds like a platitude. I'm saying it anyway, because it's true. ||

We Are Dissonance Feedback Engines

Here's where things got strange and wonderful and overwhelming all at once. After spending enough time with the goal-cause, I started to see it everywhere. Not just in

humans. In water seeking its own level. In immune cells seeking homeostasis. In ecosystems reorganizing after fire. In children learning language without being explicitly taught the rules. Continuity-seeking isn't a human trait. It's a universal one. Everything in the universe, it turns out, is running some version of this loop.

And morality, I realized — after a long argument with myself about whether I was allowed to say something this sweeping — is essentially our collective sense of what is beneficial or detrimental to continuity. For ourselves. For each other. For the systems we're embedded in. Right and wrong are downstream of Continue. They're the social and cultural elaboration of the same core drive. Kishimi and Koga wrote about the Socratic paradox "no one desires evil." This paradox is resolved by "no one desires discontinuity."

Which meant that all behavior — including the messy, labeled, pathologized responses to trauma and stress — could be understood through a different set of categories. Not clinical categories, not value judgments, but neutral, functional descriptions of how any organism navigates a dissonant world. Pete Walker gave us the 4F trauma responses — Freeze, Flight, Fawn, Fight — and they are real and important. But I wanted to see them as universal, not pathological or limiting. As the organism doing what organisms do.

So I mapped them, and what emerged was this.

There is PAUSE — the act of managing awareness, receiving feedback, slowing the loop enough to take in information before reacting. PAUSE says *wait, look, feel this ground beneath you.* PAUSE is what a tree does in winter. It is what we do when we dissociate into stillness because the input is too large to immediately process. It is not a failure. It is buying ourselves time.

There is SCAN — the act of assessing usefulness, running the internal calculation of problem versus joy, threat versus resource. SCAN sharpens our attention and hastens learning; it amplifies wave strength and drives long-term potentiation — the mechanism that makes new understanding stick. It runs our internal usefulness assessment, the continuous background process asking: *what is this? what does it mean? what can I do with it?*

There is INFLUENCE — the act of transmitting feedback, attempting to interfere with the dissonance by changing the social or relational environment around us. Influence is our social reward and approach, the waves that track benefit and move us toward what matters. INFLUENCE is connection. It is art. It is conversation. It is the attempt to change dissonance by reaching toward another.

And there is MODIFY — the act of directly changing the source of the dissonance. It is our alarm bell, our mobilizer, the waves that make our heart jump when something interrupts our state and lights a fire under our feet. MODIFY is action. It is fighting. It is fleeing. It is the organism putting its hands directly on the problem and trying to change it.

Together these four form the PSIM(I) loop — the Dissonance Feedback Engine. After the loop resolves an interruption, the new understanding, or learning, turns into lasting structural change in the brain. This process takes hours to days. Sleep is the key that locks it in. The entropic pressure against all of this — the force pushing toward disorder — is always present. Not later. Now. The loop works against it constantly. ⏸

Each response in the PSIM(I) loop is shaped by what I started calling the Continuity Bias — the gap between our optimal or expected state and our current state. The larger the gap, the more dissonant the input feels. And this gap is entirely subjective,

entirely personal, shaped by every experience we've ever had and every expectation those experiences have built. No two of us feel the same dissonance from the same input. That's not weakness or dysfunction. That's the body-mind being precisely calibrated to our individual capacity. The variability is infinite. ⏸

What the Loop Looks Like

Let me tell it as a story, not a diagram. Because it is a story — in fact, it's the oldest story there is.

At the center of the loop is the Motivation Core: the inescapable, cellular, ceaseless goal-cause. Continue. Everything radiates outward from there. And then the organism receives feedback from its environment — feedback that lands somewhere on the spectrum from deeply dissonant, contradicting everything the organism is currently oriented around, to neutral, to cohesive, confirming and reinforcing the current state.

Then the awareness spectrum activates: unaware, uncertain, or aware. Most of what happens in the brain happens outside our awareness — our brain doesn't require our supervision for most of its work. But when something dissonant enough arrives, it starts to enter the uncertain zone, and then — if it's significant enough — full awareness.

PAUSE and SCAN manage this awareness. A tree losing its leaves in winter is PAUSE and SCAN at a biological scale — no awareness, but the feedback loop still running, still responsive. A water buffalo scanning the grass for predators is SCAN in action — focused attention, usefulness assessment. A human dissociating after encountering something traumatically dissonant is also PAUSE — the system buying itself the only time it can afford when the input is catastrophically large.

Then comes the attempt to do something about it. INFLUENCE first — reach toward another, change the relational environment, make the dissonance known. If that

doesn't work, or isn't possible, MODIFY — act directly. And if neither works, the loop returns to managing awareness. In the context of overwhelming, unresolvable dissonance, that looping return is what we call being stuck. What we call chronic trauma responses. What we call the weight that doesn't lift. The loop hasn't failed. The loop is doing exactly what it's designed to do — we just haven't found a resolution yet.

Finally, after what might feel like an eternity — or a day, or a decade — comes induction. The brain arrives at a generalization from the specific experiences it's been integrating. Something new forms. A contradiction resolves. State Plasticity happens. Neuroplasticity happens. Memory reorganizes. Self-concept shifts. The submarine has moved to a new depth. ⏸

What Trauma Really Is

I want to propose a replacement. Not for clinical purposes — I'm not a clinician and I'd never pretend to be. But for our own internal use, for the way we talk to ourselves about our own history. Instead of "trauma," consider: experienced interruption to continuity.

It matters what we call things. The word "trauma" carries the weight of damage, permanence, wound. Something that happened to us and left a mark we might never be rid of. And I understand why that framing exists — it validates the severity of what happened, and that validation is real and necessary and not nothing. But there's a cost. The cost is that "trauma" can imply a kind of structural alteration that forecloses possibility. Something broken inside us that might not un-break.

Experienced contradiction to continuity reframes it. Something happened that contradicted our state so severely that the brain marked it urgently, organized around it, and has been working to process it ever since. Not damage. A remembered problem. And problems can be worked. Problems have solutions, or at least — paths through them.

There's always a doorway out. The door might be hard to find. The door might require a guide. But it exists.

Now consider: if dissonance has been over-experienced for an extended period — say, from birth, in an environment that was consistently unsafe — the entire world starts to look like a problem to PSIM(I) away. Every input arrives through the filter of a system that has been trained, over years, to expect threat. The neutral input arrives and gets classified as threatening. The ambiguous input arrives and gets classified as threatening. Even the cohesive input can arrive under suspicion.

But here's what I want us to sit with. While our brains have been marking everything as a problem, our brains have been working overtime — triangulating solution after solution, building response repertoires of extraordinary complexity, developing sensitivity and pattern recognition and internal resourcing that most people who grew up in safer environments never had to develop. The very thing that made life so hard also made us extraordinarily capable. Not broken. Not damaged. Forged.

We deserve to understand our own worth through what we've done for ourselves, not through what was done to us. ||

And one more thing — what I suspect many of us have experienced as the "inner critic," that relentless, vicious, seemingly automatic voice that narrates our failures in real time. I wonder whether that voice is a densely activated insular cortex — our self-monitoring and interoceptive awareness center — running under the influence of a chronically dysregulated amygdala. We haven't internalized a demon. We haven't made a monster of ourselves. We've internalized an overworked alarm system that learned to predict threats by cataloguing everything we might ever do wrong. It was trying to protect us. It just never got the signal that we were safe. ||

A Simple Universe

Existence, as I've come to understand it, breaks into three co-existing layers. Not stages, not a hierarchy — just different expressions of the same underlying reality.

There is Determinism: goal-causes loop without awareness. No choice, no self-direction, just the continuous interference of physics against entropy. A rock rolling downhill. A river finding the sea. The loop runs, but there is no one home to notice.

There is Agentic Life: a basic goal-cause exists — Continue — but without the capacity for awareness as we experience it. Plants turning toward light. Microorganisms seeking nutrients. Cordyceps navigating an ant's nervous system with startling precision. All of them running their own version of the PSIM(I) loop. All of them working, relentlessly, against discontinuity. Without knowing it. Without needing to know it.

And then there is Sentient Life: the layer where entropy is actively contradicted through awareness. Where the loop doesn't just run — it can be observed, reflected upon, deliberately redirected. We are this. The awareness capacity is the major difference. We are sentient continuity itself — living, breathing, fallible, extraordinary members of the universe's recursive drive to persist. ||

A note on this: when smaller humans grow in abusive environments, their brains correlate to expect hostile inputs across an ever-widening range of triggers. This isn't dysfunction — it's accurate adaptation to an environment that was genuinely threatening to continuity. The problem arises when we leave that environment and the adaptation doesn't update. Be patient with this. Be friends with low-stress people when we can. And experienced contradictions to continuity get left behind over time, as the loop finds new resolutions in a new environment. ||

Breach 03 – The Dead End: Turning Around

Tactics

Here's a thing I had to learn, and it took longer than it should have. People use four core methods to influence each other's behavior: reward, punishment, praise, and rebuke. Four levers. And in the hands of someone primarily oriented toward power over others rather than connection with others, these levers become manipulation tactics — precise, repeating, and ultimately predictable.

Ramani Durvasula describes the narcissistic abuse loop as IDD — Idealize, Devalue, Discard. When I mapped the four tactics onto the IDD cycle, something clicked into place. Praise and reward equal idealization: we are as they want us to be, not as we actually are. They're not seeing us. They're seeing a reflection of their own desired continuity. Rebuke and punishment equal devaluation: we've failed to reflect what they needed, so we're diminished. And discard is non-interference — the strategic withdrawal of engagement from someone. Not absence. Not forgetting. A deliberate removal of presence as a signal of our worthlessness to them. Though they have the capacity to assist us, we are not of sufficient value to warrant it. It is disorienting by design. And IDD itself, cycling endlessly, becomes a cycle that depends on our continued presence to function.

These tactics are for control. Implicitly — and I mean this as a precise structural observation, not a moral judgment — they are the behavior of competitive parasitism. A life organized around the pursuit of power over people, rather than love or cooperative entitlement. ⏸

And yet — and this is the part I find darkly, quietly ironic — these tactics are also, ultimately, the guarantee of our liberation. For our monsters to have truly maintained

control over us, they would have had to avoid tactics in the first place. Because every memory we accumulate of their contradictions — every instance of dissonance they created — lessens their interference with our continuity over time. The brain is always working. It is always moving toward resolution. And resolution, in this context, means seeing clearly. Which is the basis for respect. Every tactic, every IDD cycle — it all adds up, slowly, relentlessly, to a clearer picture of who they are and what we deserve. If they'd really wanted us to remain compliant, kindness was the only method that would have worked. Instead, they chose the one method that always, eventually, leads to our growing awareness of the truth. Their tactics guaranteed our liberation. ||

Accountability is Re-education

Accountability for those behaviors is not a problem. Accountability is how the truth gets named — how what happened gets attached to what it cost, and what needs to change. We need that. It's a door out.

Punishment is what happens when accountability gets hijacked by revenge. They look the same from the outside. They can feel the same from the inside too. But they're not aimed at the same thing. Accountability says: this happened, here is what it cost, here is what has to be different. Revenge says: this happened, and now you suffer. One is re-education. One is retaliation.

And here's the part worth knowing: punishment doesn't change the pattern. It deepens it. A person under threat doesn't become reflective — they become defensive. We know this in our own body-minds. We know what it felt like when someone came at us with shame instead of truth. The loop didn't open. It closed tighter.

This is why people struggling with addiction do better in social reintegration programs than in prison. Not because consequences don't matter — they do — but

because threat narrows, and safety opens. The organism under siege protects itself. The organism given ground to stand on can start to look around.

It's the same mechanism that gives a narcissist any real chance of holding the mirror. Not sympathy that excuses what they did. Not punishment that locks the loop shut. Accountability that says: look at this clearly, look at what it cost, here is what has to change — offered from a place of safety, not siege.

We are not required to be the ones who deliver it. We are not obligated to provide anyone the conditions for their own growth, especially not at the cost of our own. But it helps to know the difference between wanting someone to change and wanting them to hurt. Only one of those is a door. ⏸

The Core Task

Don't we think it's strange — bewildering, even — that others, and ourselves, could believe we're failures? When in fact we've been incredibly successful at the core task we all emerged doing.

We have continued. Against all of it, through all of it, despite all of it — we have continued. There was no roadmap. There was no guarantee. There were, in many cases, active forces working against us from the very environments that were supposed to nurture us. And we continued anyway, using whatever tools we had, making whatever adaptations were available, finding whatever small footholds of relief or connection or meaning we could locate.

Self-destruction? Sure. Every act, looked at through the right lens, is a defiance of that which would contradict our continuity. A desperate, imperfect, completely understandable MODIFY response from a body-mind that hadn't yet found a way to MODIFY or INFLUENCE the source of the dissonance itself. And the most heartbreaking

expression of this — can sometimes be understood as trying to leave life behind. We become people screaming in silence with every fiber of a being that has been overwhelmed with dissonance past its current capacity to resolve. The dissonance that feels permanent is not permanent. My prior suicidal thoughts from my past self-emerged from a place of overwhelming dissonant distress. It was the stress of the clash between what I didn't realize I wanted for myself and where I currently was. I found that self-actualization and improvement helped a lot. I wanted the incoherence to be over, so I wrote this book as my own resolution. There's no solution in ending the one thing capable of resolving the dissonance. We're meant to be here. We continue.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call or text 988. ⏸

Us vs Them

The us-versus-them logic is, when you follow it all the way to its end, utterly useless — meaningful only insofar as it hastens the end of something. The Socratic paradox — "No one desires evil" — resolves, through the teleoaitological lens, to "No one desires discontinuity." We all share the same goal-cause. Every one of us, including the ones who have hurt us most, are running the same loop, oriented toward the same destination, working with the equipment and correlations we currently have.

Trauma — experienced contradiction to continuity — is stored in our brain organization as a whole, slowly reorganizing naturally through entropy, through new experience, through the relentless background work of the PSIM(I) loop. Narcissists — those who propagate discontinuity, who create chaos intentionally as a means of extracting resources from others — are also running the loop. Just with less developmental complexity, less capacity for the kind of integration that makes genuine connection possible.

Our correlates — the neural organizations we've been building — are organized around having survived the absolute worst inputs people and the universe could throw at us. Let's not devalue that. Let's not devalue ourselves by measuring our worth against the temporary success of those who haven't needed to develop what we've developed. The brain is always re-correlating to the environment it's in. Which means we've never been truly stuck anywhere at all. We've always been moving. ⏸

Masters, Slaves, and the Parent-Child Truth

Some people believe the fundamental structure of any two-person relationship is master and slave. The powerful one and the powerless one. The one who determines and the one who is determined. There's a certain kind of fatalism hiding in that belief — the assumption that dominance hierarchies are fixed, that the powerful will always win, that resistance is rearranging furniture in a burning building. That it’s pointless.

Adler firmly rejects fatalism. And so do I. Not because the world isn't full of power differences — it clearly is — but because fatalism is itself a cognitive pattern, a correlational organization, and correlations reorganize. The brain is always re-correlating. We are never as stuck as we feel.

The core relationship of two has always been, at its deepest level, parent and child. The one and the next one. The one who has more and the one who needs more — and the question of whether what is had will be given. Not as a permanent hierarchy, but as a passing condition. We are all, at different moments, the parent and the child. We are all, at different moments, the one with more capacity and the one who needs more.

And here's the miracle hiding inside that: even in our own brains — in the case of our countless neurons — there are trillions of small "I"s working together in one large "I." The happiness of the whole is the cumulative unfolding of every small part. We are, at the

cellular level, already practicing cooperative entitlement. The master-slave model isn't the truth of what we are. It's a story some of us learned, and stories can be unlearned. ⏸

The Graveyard of Meaning

To say that meaning is not useful is to not presently understand that meaning is made because it is found to be useful. Those who say there is no inherent meaning and those who say a meaning is useless are different things entirely. One is aware that meaning is useful, even if it isn't inherent. The other has lost even that.

To the one who has become unaware of meaning's use — you walk toward disintegration, slowly, carefully, quietly. The path of perceived useless meaning is one of individual correlational disintegration. At every moment there is a chance to turn around. But at every moment that chance becomes less seen, as the correlates narrow, as the loop turns inward with fewer and fewer inputs to work with, as the world gets smaller and the horizon pulls closer.

This is the Graveyard of the mind. What was once a raging ocean — crashing upon the shores of the universe, correlating to boundless novelty, finding meaning in everything it touched — is now a small puddle. Evaporating on the surface of a barren world, with no hope of even a ripple. If you are the puddle right now: you are not broken. You are still water. Water that has forgotten the tide doesn't stop being water. The ocean isn't something you used to be — it is what you are, underneath the evaporation. It is waiting for input.

To this puddle, may others rain on you. May this rain flood the bounds of your correlates, so that you may find use in your waves, and see the use of faraway oceans. ⏸

Competitive Narcissism vs Collaborative Entitlement

Host-killers go extinct. This is not a moral statement. It's an ecological one. An organism that destroys its host destroys the conditions for its own survival. The parasite that kills too quickly runs out of hosts. The parasite that learns to coexist — that moderates its extraction, that finds some way to give back, even accidentally — survives much longer, surrounded by the system it depends on.

Competitive parasitism seeks everything with no return, and in seeking everything, ends up alone and dying. Cooperative entitlement seeks mutual benefit, cooperative improvements, the kind of abundance that only multiplies when it's shared. It survives. It thrives. It builds communities and families and friendships and institutions that actually work.

Narcissism — at the level of individuals, families, corporations, nations — is competitive parasitism driving systems toward the dead end. A narcissist consumes supply without regard for what it's consuming, and the end result is always the same: left alone in search of supply until there's nothing left but itself and a void. That is the track our species has been veering away from. We could still veer back. What is a corporation but cooperative entitlement to good results? What is a community but cooperative entitlement to our lives? However, there is a parasite in the room that must learn to understand what it's doing to the room. ||

Paradoxes

I've sat with four contradictions long enough that they've stopped feeling like paradoxes and started feeling like the actual shape of things. If the goal of Life is Life itself, then to fully understand life we must know death — we must look directly at discontinuity and understand what it is we're always turning away from. If the goal of Love is Love itself, then to fully understand love we must know indifference — the absence of response, the experience of reaching toward another and finding nothing reaching back.

And the loop continues. If the goal of Indifference is Indifference itself — the state of not being moved, of having closed the loop against further input — then the thing Indifference reaches toward, without knowing it, is Love. Because only Love carries the novelty, the contradiction, the aliveness that breaks stasis. And if the goal of Death is Death itself — if discontinuity fully achieved is the end state — then what Death has been reaching toward, in the only direction there is, is Life. The thing that contradicts it. The thing that will not let it be final. These are observations about the structure of a recursive universe. II

Empathy Is Understanding

Empathy is a cognitive task. A skill. Something that develops through practice, through exposure, through the willingness to sit with the dissonance of another person's reality rather than quickly resolving it into something more comfortable. Not trying to understand is the absence of empathy. Trying to understand — even badly, even with mistakes, even through misunderstanding that gets corrected — leads to more empathic capacity. Every resolved contradiction is a new correlate. Every moment of genuine contact between two different correlations of experience is neuroplasticity in action.

Neuroplasticity isn't a tool we pick up when we decide to grow. It isn't something we choose to do, or could choose to stop. Learning — real neuroplastic change, the kind that builds new correlates and shifts the architecture of how we see — is what Continue looks like from the inside, at the level of the cell.

Every time the PSIM(I) loop runs, every time a contradiction is inducted and resolved, the brain has learned. Not because it decided to. Because neurons do what neurons do when perturbed: they restabilize, and restabilization changes them. That's the whole mechanism. That's the whole miracle. We cannot stop learning any more than we

can stop existing. They are the same process, seen from different angles — the biological verb of Continue, running in both directions at once.

What varies isn't whether we're learning. It's the direction the learning moves. Toward greater complexity, toward new correlates, toward the kind of integration that makes connection possible — or toward narrowing, toward the Graveyard, toward the collapse of inputs and the evaporation of the ocean into a small puddle. Both are learning. Both are the loop running. The goal-cause drives both. The difference is whether new contradictions are being introduced, or whether the loop is feeding only on itself.

This means there is no such thing as being stuck in the permanent sense. The loop is always running. The question is only what it's running on.

Those who lack empathy aren't "unaware" in the dismissive, condescending sense we sometimes use that word. They are at a different developmental point. If we want to help — and I think we do, or at least some of us do some of the time — we shouldn't stand at the entrance of their experience complaining about "awareness." We meet them where they are. We walk with them. What they need is not "awareness" as an abstract demand. What they need is learning. And learning requires a teacher. Is that us? Do we love them enough to try? That's a real question, not a rhetorical one. Some of us can. And some of us have already given everything we had to that question — and the most loving thing we can do now is stop asking it, and leave. Both are true. Both are legitimate. ||

Our Stories

Here's something I sat with for a long time before I felt ready to say it. It's not a comfortable idea. But I think it might be one of the most freeing ones in this whole book.

We don't store stories. We store correlates.

Memory shows up as clusters of interconnected neurons — dense, emergent webs that can be approached from different directions, lit up by different triggers, felt through different neurotransmitters depending on the emotional state we're in when we arrive. Memory is not a film reel. It's a tool for continuity. And every time we remember something, we're not playing back a recording — we're calling up the tool in real time, from whichever parts happen to be active in this present moment, filtered through the continuity bias we're currently carrying.

What this means, quietly and enormously, is that the narrative we call "my life" or "my family" or "what happened to me" is not a fixed object. It is a SCAN. It is what the loop produces right now, today, from the correlate cluster it has available. It feels like truth because it is truth — from the inside of the loop that generated it. But it is present-tense truth. Reconstructed truth. The most traveled path through a particular cluster of neurons, worn into groove by repetition until it feels like the only path until a contradiction arrives.

Which means: the story "I am broken" is not a fact being retrieved. It is a tool we use for our continuity. The correlates that produce that story are real. The neurons are firing right now. But the story is not the only output those correlates could produce. It is the most frequent one — the most automatic, the most confirmed by years of repetition in environments that kept confirming it helped us continue.

And here is the other side of that: new contradictions, introduced deliberately or by chance, build new paths. Not erase the old ones — neurons don't delete — but grow alternatives. Detours through the same territory that reach different conclusions. Over entropy, if the new path is traveled enough, it becomes the automatic one. The old groove grows quieter. Not gone. Just less traveled.

This is what healing looks like from the inside of a body-mind. Not the rewriting of history. The building of new correlate paths through old territory, until the new routes become the familiar ones.

None of this means your history didn't happen. The contradictions to your continuity were real. They were inducted, they changed the architecture, they're firing right now in ways you didn't choose. But the story you've been told about what those contradictions mean — about who you are because of them — that story is a present tool. And present tools, unlike the past, change toward true continuity if contradicted. ||

But Continuity Itself Is Not a Story

Someone will bring up the illusion argument. They usually do. "Continuity is an illusion," they'll say. "The self is a story the brain tells. There's no real thread. There's just moment after moment, stitched together in hindsight."

And they're half right. The narrative version of continuity — the story "I am the same person I was as a child" — is exactly what we just described. A present SCAN. A present-tense path through correlates. Not a recording. Presented now, every time.

But here's where the argument trips over itself. To declare continuity an illusion, you need a body-mind that has remained coherent enough across entropy to form the concept, hold it, and apply it to its own experience. The declaration depends on the thing it denies. You cannot call the loop an illusion while the loop is running the sentence that says so.

There are two different things that people call continuity, and only one of them is manufactured:

Type	What It Is	Is It Manufactured?
Narrative continuity	The story of who you are across time — a present SCAN	Yes. "Our Stories" covers this.
Processual continuity	The loop running. The organism continuing right now.	No. This is the substrate, or bottom, the stories are built on.

The illusion argument notices the first kind and concludes the second kind doesn't exist. That's the error. The narrative is constructed by something that is genuinely, non-narratively running — right now, in you, in every body-mind that reads this.

This is why the Teleoaitia is not a story. Continue is not a narrative we tell about organisms. It is what the loop is, doing what it does, whether we have language for it or not. You cannot coherently deny it. The denial is made of it. ||

Breach 04 – The Endless Work: Emergence

One Neuron, Then Two

If a single neuron is alone in the universe, it simply repeats its state. There is nothing to contradict it, nothing to destabilize its state, nothing to set the loop in motion. It holds. It waits. It persists in its current correlation because there are no waves arriving to suggest any other correlation is necessary.

When there are two, everything changes. Feedback happens alongside the body, and so they change. The first neuron's output becomes the second neuron's input. The second neuron's response becomes new input for the first. A loop has begun. A relationship has begun. And from that smallest possible beginning — two neurons in dissonant conversation — emerges all the complexity we know. All the awareness. All the interference. All the meaning. All the suffering and all the joy.

We are never truly alone in the loop of change. Even in the most isolated moments of our lives, trillions of small voices inside us are in conversation with each other. The work of continuity is endless, and it is happening right now, whether or not we're paying attention to it. That's not a burden. That's a fact that should make us feel slightly less alone than we sometimes do. ||

The Scale of Continuity-Seeking

One thing that helped me hold the whole picture was mapping what the continuity-seeking loop produces at each scale of organization. It isn’t just personal. It runs everywhere we look — and the only thing that changes as we zoom out is the consensus the loop produces.

Scale	What PSIM(I) Produces	What We Call It
Single neuron	Electrochemical stability	Waves or Signal
Single body-mind	Correlate cluster	Memory / Experience
Small group of body-minds	Shared SCAN correlates	Narrative / Culture / Family Story
Large group across generations	Highly stable shared correlate	“Objective fact”
Universal	Maximum entropy resistance	Physics / the Teleoaitia

The loop doesn’t shrink or expand as you zoom in or out. It is the same loop. What changes is how many body-minds are running it in the same direction, and how long they’ve been doing so. Only time, contradiction, and honest looking reveal our deepest truths. ⏸

Entropy as the Great Interruption

As entropy would have it, none of us are entitled to anything at all. Not food, not water, not safety, not sleep, not the love of another person, not even our very lives. The universe has no obligation to maintain our continuity. Disorder is the default. Dissolution is the direction everything trends toward if left uncontradicted.

And yet. It is in our very cells themselves — the capacity to contradict this. Every metabolic process is an act of defiance against entropy. Every heartbeat. Every breath. Every neuron firing through our correlates, pushes back against the silence that waits on the other side of all incoming waves. We are, at the most fundamental level, the universe contradicting itself. And somehow, that doesn't feel like an accident. ⏸

The Consensus We Call Truth

There is one more thing I almost didn’t include. I kept taking it out and putting it back in. I include it now because I think it might be the most useful idea in this book for the specific people I wrote it for. Objectivism is subjective consensus. Not truth.

Let me show you what I mean through the framework we've already built. A single body-mind inducting a contradiction produces something we call experience. Two body-minds inducting the same contradiction in the same direction, arriving at the same resolution, produces something we might call consensus, or an agreement. A thousand body-minds across generations all inducting the same contradiction and arriving at the same resolution — with every discontinuous body-mind receiving swift correction from the surrounding environment, or entropy — produces something we call objective fact.

But not everything we call objective fact is the bottom. Some things we call objective are the consensus of five people in a household over two decades. Some things are the consensus of a culture over a century. These feel, from the inside, exactly as solid as facts. The amygdala does not distinguish between a physical law and a family narrative — it only knows whether the correlate cluster has been contradicted or confirmed, again and again, by the people and environment it has lived inside.

This matters enormously for those of us who grew up in systems with a shared story about what happened, who was responsible, and what we are because of it. That story is not a fact. It is a correlate cluster, built from repeated inductions in a small and often traumatized group over a limited span of time. It was reinforced as truth. It feels like truth. But it is not fact. It can be contradicted. And when it is — when a new body-mind introduces a new input, when a book like this one lands differently than expected, when a conversation finally happens — the consensus shifts. Quietly, incrementally, inevitably.

I want to be precise about one thing, because I know how this can be misread. Saying objectivism is subjective consensus is not the same as saying harm didn't happen, or that all interpretations are equally valid. The contradictions were inducted. The body-minds that experienced them were changed by them. The correlates are firing right now. That is real, regardless of any metaphysical question about relation to truth.

Locating harm in the correlate cluster is not dismissing it. It is finding it more precisely — which is the only thing that makes it workable. Problems that live in the correlate map have paths out. Problems that live in metaphysical fact do not. We always have a way forward. ||

Giving

Adler rejects fatalism with a particular kind of clarity that I found relieving. The present belief that events will inevitably lead to one outcome no matter what we do — that we are passengers in the story of ourselves, watching the conclusion approach without the capacity to redirect it — is itself a cognitive pattern. A correlational organization. And correlates reorganize against dissonance.

Not finding understanding of ourselves is fatalistic in exactly this sense: we've come to believe our present self is fine as-is, complete, finished, requiring no further growth or integration. And this is, in a strange way, not reaching a resolution to our presently dissonant experiences. It is the loop stalling, convincing itself the stall is a destination.

It is in giving to ourselves — the genuine, patient, sometimes painful work of extending toward our own interior with the same curiosity and care we might extend toward someone we love — and giving to others, that we learn understanding and respect for ourselves as we unfold. Not as we wish we were. Not as we were before. As we are, right now, still in motion, still in the loop, still heading somewhere we can't quite see yet. ||

Abyss Mouth

We have reached the mouth of the abyss together. You and I. We and us. To the ones at this final breach — we ate the world too. Many of us did. We didn't understand what we

were doing, or why, or what it cost. Until we lost our fangs. Until we broke our claws. Until we shed the scales that had grown over us in layers thick enough to keep everything out — including the things we needed most. We're safe here. On this side of all of it.

Whoever we are — whatever shape the Nightmare took, whatever names were used for the monsters, if we were monstrous, whatever form the long descent took — we have many choices now. It is not that dissonance traumatized us. It's that the induction of dissonance and contradiction is our very nature. We were built for this. The capacity to encounter the unbearable and keep running the loop — that's what we are.

Which direction did we come from? Did we leave the abyss? Or did we find it? Either way, we've arrived somewhere beyond the scope of the nightmare. The mask is gone — the one we put on, the ones that were put on us, the ones we wore until we couldn't remember our own face underneath. We emerge from the waters. Blinking. Real.

Who are we? We are the arrows. ||

Child of the Universe

The Universe's children are not its children. We are the children of Life's longing for itself. We come through the Universe but not from the Universe, And though we are with the Universe, yet we belong not to the Universe.

The Universe may give us its love but not its thoughts, For we have our own thoughts.

The Universe may house our bodies but not our souls, For our souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which the universe cannot visit even in its dreams.

The Universe may strive to be like us, but it seeks not to make us like itself. For entropy goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

The Universe is the bow from which we as living arrows are sent forth. The Archer sees the

mark upon the path of the infinite, and the Archer bends the Universe with its might that the Archer's Arrows may go swift and far.

Let the Universe's bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness; For even as the Archer loves the arrow that flies, so the Archer loves also the bow that is stable.

(Inspired by Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet.*)*

Wolf and Lamb

The Slave wakes up, bow in hand, sitting on fallen chains. The slave approaches the Master.

Master, bound in their own chains: *"Put them back on."*

Slave: *"No, do you need help?"*

Master: *"Never from the likes of one so disgusting and evil as yourself. Put those chains back on. Better a slave than dead. You are my enemy."*

Slave: *"I refuse."*

Master: *"Then you die."*

The Master's scorpion tale struck the slave through their heart and they died. The wolf starved in its chains with the last of the lamb being unsustaining, for the Master was also a Slave. As allies, surely there would have been somewhere else to be? But as it was Rapture, the Lamb came back for the Wolf again and said:

"You are being left behind. Why not join us?"

The Wolf, flooded by Satan's will, starved and ravenous, projected its world for the Lamb to See:

"You are Evil."

And so the Lamb Saw, and lay down with the wolf, feeding it understanding until it knew nothing else. Spared from self-inflicted death, the wolf asks why:

"Why not Judge and Punish me, like I have Judged and Punished you?"

"None shall be harmed on this mountain, and I am not a Judge."

"But you said—"

"I told you not to eat the apple, yet by the very nature I've designed, you in freedom ate. Now eat and drink of the Earth you've been given, then we'll head home — together. I love you."

"I've only ever wanted to eat you."

And so the Wolf and the Lamb, Man and God, shared of their oceans. And the world was Flattened. There was no Above and Below. For God was the most Far, not the most High. Amen.

Starve the wolf, so that it might understand the lamb is who brought it food.

Beware to those who seek to consume people, like the wolf. They will sit on a throne in the void, and perish alone, forgotten to all, remembered by none.

The pressure is changing. We're ascending.

The Surface

We said at the beginning we'd get here together. And here we are. I realized, somewhere in the middle of this fourth breach, that I had spent the entire dive defining what the Nightmare was. What the PSIM(I) loop is. What trauma really means. What our monsters

are made of. All of it important. All of it necessary. But I had never quite turned around and faced what comes after the dive.

Through the teleoaitological lens is not a destination. It isn't a correlate cluster we arrive at and then inhabit permanently, like moving into a house after a long drive. It's a quality of how the loop runs.

When a body-mind is no longer dominated by the threat-detection bias of a chronically dysregulated amygdala — when the alarm system that learned to predict danger has finally received enough contradicting evidence that the environment is safe — the PSIM(I) loop doesn't disappear. It just runs differently. The same four responses are still there. They just have more to work with.

Pause becomes rest. Not dissociation, not hiding from what's arriving — actual rest. The kind where the body-mind is quiet because nothing is threatening, and the system uses that stillness to consolidate what it has learned. This is what sleep was always supposed to feel like. This is what meditation is learning to approximate. This is the organism doing what it was always designed to do when the emergency is over: close the loop in the dark, and wake up slightly changed.

Scan becomes curiosity. The same function that was scanning for threat — sharpening attention, assessing usefulness, running the internal calculation — becomes available for novelty. For the particular pleasure of noticing something you haven't noticed before. Curiosity is just a Scan that isn't afraid of what it will find. It turns out the SCAN function is, underneath the threat-overlay, a remarkable engine for wonder.

Influence becomes connection. When we reach toward others primarily because we want to — not to manage our own safety or regulate our own dysregulated state — something different happens in the loop. The feedback we receive is no longer evaluated primarily for threat. It becomes information. It becomes warmth. It becomes, in the best moments, the thing those first two neurons discovered when they fired alongside each

other for the first time: that feedback changes us, and being changed by each other is not a vulnerability. It is the whole point.

Modify becomes creativity. Direct action on the world, when it isn't primarily motivated by the need to stop something from hurting us, becomes the capacity to make things. To build. To change not just our own situation but the situations of people around us. Cooperative entitlement in motion. The organism putting its hands on the world not in desperation but in genuine, resourced, chosen engagement.

This is what I mean by thriving. Not the absence of dissonance — dissonance arrives until the last day. Not the absence of the loop — the loop runs until the same last day. But the loop running in a body-mind that is no longer constantly braced for discontinuity. A body-mind with enough safety inside it that it can make something out of what arrives, rather than just surviving it. The space between experience and response, where choice actually lives — we earned that space by running the loop until the contradiction resolved. No experience is in itself what determines our continuity or discontinuity. We do not suffer from the dissonant interruptions of our memories — the trauma — but instead we marks input as discontinuous when clashes with our continuity inevitably arrive. We are not determined by our memories, but by the threat of discontinuity determined by our present correlates. The body doesn't keep the score; we seek continuity. II

The Truth You Hold

Well, this is where we part ways. I, the creator of these pages, wish you the best. My words can only do so much. In the end, this book is a big box. Sometimes we make boxes for ourselves to try and fit together all the things we don't really understand yet. Even if we make a box the size of the universe, in the end it's still a box. Even if it holds all the other boxes people make for themselves. The way we continue our life is up to us. It's up to you now, but don't be afraid to come back here any time you need.

Go make your own story. It's just as valid as anyone else's. Believe it. Live it. Grab your bow and hunt through the dissonance. May your aims be true. May your sight be revelatory. May the arrows we send disintegrate the aspects of ourselves which threaten to discontinue us all. May it be purged from within us all.

Goodbye, and happy hunting.

With raging love, and a tender nudge,

Someone free.

Expand the Horizon: Sources That Shaped This Story

The following works directly informed the ideas in this book. I owe each of them an enormous debt.

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Adlerian Continuity: End the Nightmare

By Charles D. Miller V

All ideas, frameworks, and original wording are the author's own.

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